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## Chizuk - Inspiration

Emes can sometimes be defined as personal integrity - maintaining deeply held values, even if it comes at great personal cost. When Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky ZT"l was serving as the rabbi of a small town in Lithuania before World War II, his salary was paid from the tax that the town levied on Kosher meat. During this period, he noticed that some poor families were buying meat that was not kosher because it was cheaper, even though they really wanted to keep kosher.

Instead of ignoring the situation or simply condemning the purchase of the non-kosher meat, Rabbi Kamenetsky took a voluntary pay cut. His reasoning was that since his salary was contributing to the higher cost of kosher meat, and this was causing people to compromise their religious observance, he could not in good conscience take his full salary.

He explained to the community council that he would rather manage with less than know his wages were inadvertently causing fellow Jews to eat non-kosher food. This decision, made at personal cost during already difficult economic times, demonstrated his understanding that true integrity sometimes requires real sacrifice – be it financial or otherwise.

## On The Parsha

"It was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants became transformed regarding the people, and they said, 'What is this that we have done, that we have sent away Israel from serving us?'" (Shemos 14:5)

The Ramban asks a fascinating question: Why were Pharaoh and the Egyptians surprised that Bnei Yisrael had fled and were not coming back? After all, the Egyptians had explicitly given permission to Bnei Yisrael to leave! However, that is not what the Egyptians believed as the verse above states, "It was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled..." The Hebrew word for "fled" is "חָרַב" which is a term that

implies that the Egyptians believed that Bnei Yisrael had left without permission.

The Ramban explains that the Egyptians had convinced themselves that Bnei Yisrael would return after a three-day trip in the wilderness, despite never having secured such a promise from them. While Moshe Rabbeinu had initially requested a three-day journey to serve Hashem, the final negotiation with Pharaoh resulted in an unconditional release. However, the Egyptians chose to hear what they wanted to hear, so they heard the initial request of Moshe and chose to ignore the final negotiation with Pharaoh. Now that they believed that they were wronged and that Bnei Yisrael should have returned to Egypt, they felt fully justified in their subsequent pursuit to bring them back.

This teaches us an important lesson about truth and self-deception. Often, when we want something badly enough, we hear what we want to hear rather than hearing what was actually said or agreed upon. This can lead to courses of action that we erroneously feel are justifiable - courses of action that we would not have taken and are not justifiable which we would have realized if we would have listened more carefully.

## Halacha – Jewish Law

There are a number of Mesivtos (Orthodox Jewish high schools) that serve our community. There are top tier, middle tier, and lower tier Mesivtos and, understandably, it is more difficult to get accepted to the top tier Mesivtos. The Mesivtos often compete with each other in an effort to obtain, "the best guys" in their view.

In the past, every Mesivta in our community shared the same application deadline. However, this year, some middle-tier Mesivtas changed their application deadline, making it earlier than the others. With the understanding that many of the best guys have applied to their middle-tier Mesivta as well as a top-tier Mesivta, the middle tier Mesivta endeavors to issue its acceptance before the top-tier Mesivta has a

chance to evaluate the application. The middle-tier Mesivta then conditions its acceptance on an almost immediate acceptance and commitment to attend the school. This is done in an attempt to lock-in “the best guy” before the top-tier Mesivta has had a chance to evaluate his application.

Here is the dilemma parents face:

1. Many parents hope that their child will get into a top-tier Mesivta;
2. The middle-tier Mesivtas are demanding a prompt commitment (and a deposit);
3. If a parent declines the middle-tier Mesivta’s acceptance offer, and their child is not ultimately accepted to a top-tier Mesivta which has not had a chance to evaluate applications yet, the only remaining option would be to have their son attend a lower-tier Mesivta which the parents may believe is not a desirable outcome.

The question is: Is it permissible for parents to falsely commit to have their son attend a middle-tier Mesivta while still hoping to get into (and potentially accept) a spot at a top-tier Mesivta?

ANSWER: There is a Talmud Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 3:9) where Rabbi Chiya Bar Abba posed a question before Rabbi Yasa who then asked him, “Are you asking me in a practical case?” (Is your question one that has practical, real-life implications or are you asking me an academic, hypothetical question?) He answered, “No.” (Accordingly, Rabbi Yasa did not answer the question being asked). Rabbi Ze’ira was dissatisfied that he (Rabbi Chiya Bar Abba) had not asked in a practical case, to know what he would have said.

The implication of this Gemorah is that Rabbi Ze’ira would have wanted Rabbi Chiya Bar Abba to tell a lie to Rabbi Yasa and say that he was asking a practical question so Rabbi Yasa would have answered the question, and more Torah knowledge could have been shared. This is the conclusion of Rav Palagi in his Sefer called Chofetz Chaim (19:6).

We see from the above, that in certain circumstances, one is allowed to lie if it leads to the exchange of more Torah knowledge. Accordingly, it would appear that parents may falsely commit to have their son attend a middle-tier Mesivta while still hoping to get into (and potentially accept) a spot at a top-tier Mesivta, as the enrollment in a top-tier Mesivta may facilitate or foster more growth in Torah

learning than a middle-tier Mesivta. This assumes that the middle-tier Mesivta would not incur any financial damage if the commitment was broken and the son attended the top-tier Mesivta (which would appear to be the case in your question above).

Another caveat cited by the author of the Yalkut Yoseph (Volume II Kivud Av V’Aim p. 237): One may only do so (i.e. lie if it furthers Torah knowledge) if his intent is 100% Lishma – that he is doing it solely to learn more Torah and not for any other purposes. Accordingly, if the parents of the boy want him to attend the top-tier Mesivta because it will further his Torah knowledge and because of the status he may obtain by attending a top tier Mesivta, then the practice would not be permitted.

One final note: Even when permitted, if possible, one should minimize any lie that may be said when giving the commitment to the middle-tier Mesivta. For example, when asked by the middle-tier Mesivta if their son will be attending, the parents should reply in a way that may be interpreted as an acceptance without saying an outright lie. As an example, when the middle-tier Mesivta says that your son is accepted and they ask if you will be sending your son to their school, respond with, “Where else would we send him to?”

We must also keep in mind that the best Sevivah (environment) for a student is often not a high pressure, top tier Mesivta but one that is uniquely suited for his personal needs and personal growth.

*“May I back out of a school carpool that  
I have already committed to?”  
“Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?”*

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